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AUTHOR Massey, Sara R.; Crosby, Jeanie
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ABSTRACT

In 1979 a program was initiated at the Georges Valley High School in Thomaston, Maine, to identify high risk students who would be likely to drop out of high school and then to design and implement a program for ninth grade students that would motivate them to stay in school. A subsequent review of the impact of the program on its participants showed that the goal of the program was being achieved. A strong correlation between program participation and staying in school was found. However, the grades, attendance, number of suspensions and detentions, and extra curricular involvement of the participating students were not markedly better as a group. The program evalution findings suggest that further research and improved record-keeping may improve the effectiveness of the program. (JAC)

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New England Institute in Education

17 Driftwood Lane
Scarborough, Maine 04074

Study of
Georges Valley High School
Drop Out Program

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Jeanie Crosby, Ed.D.
Sara Massey, Ed.D.

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SUBMITTED BY:

Sara R. Massey
New England Institute in Education
17 Driftwood Lane
Scarborough, ME 04074

(207) 883-3337

Introduction

In 1979 a three-year Title IVC project titled "Rocks, Ropes, Rowing, and Running" was funded at the Georges Valley High School in Thomaston, Maine. The purposes of this project were:

1. To identify high risk students who were candidates likely to drop out of school during their high school years and

2. To design and implement a program for students during their 9th grade year that would motivate them to remain in school through graduation.

During the three years of this project students have been identified for participation in the program through the following process:

1. Meetings were held by the program coordinator with the 8th grade teachers in which it was requested that they submit to the coordinator a prioritized list of students who were characterized by any of the following:

   significant behavior problems
   poor self-concepts
   poor motivation
   academic problems
   history of family problems

2. These lists were then reviewed by the guidance counselor who compiled the lists and rank-ordered the students using his own perceptions about these students using the above characteristics.

3. For the school year beginning September, 1979, the 22 students at the top of the list were admitted to the program. During 1980-81, 25 students were in the program. In 1981-82, 16 students were admitted.

The program as designed and implemented during the 9th grade year has varied from year to year but has consistently included the following characteristics:

1. has been in addition to the regular school programs, with most activities after school or on weekends. It is not a "pull-out" program.

2. has been offered for a maximum of 2 credits

3. has had voluntary participation

4. has focused on experiential activities

5. has included boys and girls.

The experiential activities have consistently incorporated 1) three 5-7 day courses (fall, winter, spring) at the Hurricane Island Outward Bound School; 2) monthly weekend expeditions (hiking, skiing, ice fishing); and 3) community projects. During the last two years, in-school tutoring and counseling have been included as program components.

Staffing of the project has changed each year. During the first year of operation, the program was coordinated by a local retired school superintendent. During the second year a male, experienced in Outward Bound, instructor was in charge. In the third year a female experienced in Outward Bound approaches worked with the second year's coordinator on a part-time basis.

The purpose of this study is to review the impact of this program on its participants. The intent of the program is to motivate high risk secondary students to remain in school through graduation. Students participating in the program in 1979-80 are now in their junior and senior years and those participants in 80-81 are in their sophomore year.

The research questions addressed in this study are based on the project's objectives. Although the specific wording in these objectives has changed from year to year, the areas of concern have remained stable. All project objectives are reflected in these research questions except for the objective related to self-concept. Project staff are informally assessing progress toward this objective. The research questions in the study follow:

1. Are the participants increasing their grades?

2. Are participants increasing their school attendance?

3. Are participants reducing their detentions and suspensions?

4. Are participants increasing their participation in the school's extra-curricular activities?

5. Are participants remaining in school?

6. Is participants' increase or decrease in the above areas related to their level of voluntary participation?

The result of the study is an interim report based on indicators of progress toward objectives. Final, longitudinal information related to the project's goal of keeping students in school until graduation will not be available until June, 1985, when participants who were freshmen in 81-82 would be expected to graduate.

It appears that the time between 10th and 11th grades is especially crucial for students who drop out. Therefore, the information related to numbers dropping out is especially important in relation to the first group of program participants.

The information related to these research questions has been collected not only for program participants, but also for a comparison group of students. This group consists of twenty students from the grade 8 class of 77-78 who would have been in grade 9 in 78-79, the year before the program began. This comparison group was selected by the same process used for selecting program participants. If the program had existed at Georges Valley High School in 78-79, these students would have been selected for participation and would now be in their senior year.

Information Collection

Individual participant and non-participant or comparison group profile sheets for recording information from school and program records and class profile sheets for aggregating information were designed by the Institute. The information was then collected and recorded by the program staff.

The information collection process as reported by the project staff illuminated several concerns about school record-keeping and the interpretation of this information. Students' grades were recorded clearly. Computing grade point averages was sometimes complicated by vague information about the credit value of some voca-

tional educaton courses. Grade point averages for students who dropped out were computed using their last quarter grades recorded. Occasionally unexcused absences seemed to be included in the detention figures, perhaps inflating those numbers. Suspensions figures indicate the number of days suspended, not the number of suspensions. There was some information, such as extra-curricular activities, that was not available for the comparison group.

Special care was taken by the staff collecting the information to follow up on students who had left school. This task was complicated by the large number who had transferred or who had left school, returned, then gone to another school, etc. The number of students coming and going during the year means that the absence, detention, and suspension information in several cases does not cover a whole school year. The attempts to collect information by tracking each student in both the participant and comparison groups attest to the staff's interest in and concern about the program.

Analysis

The information was analyzed for each individual student and for each of the four groups of students. Several pieces of information were also analyzed for women and for men. Statistical treatments were used several times in attempting to relate the level of program participation to student progress in other areas. No significant statistical correlations were found. The results of this analysis, used in deriving the research findings, are detailed in the Appendix.

Research Findings

1. Are participants increasing their grades?

Individual students appear to be raising their grade point averages slightly. The average annual changes in GPA for the 3 groups of participants after grade 9 range from a low of -.03 (the only negative change) to +.20 on a 4 point scale. This

slight increase takes on more importance in view of the fact that fewer of these marginal students are dropping out. They are both staying in school and contributing to this slight increase in their group's grade point average.

The transition from grade 8 to 9 has traditionally signaled a drop in grades. In the comparison group of non-participants who were in grade 9 in 1978-79, only 1 student of 17 had a higher GPA than in grade 8 and 8 of the 17 (47%) students' grades fell by 1 or more point. In the first year of the program, 16% of the participants had a higher GPA in grade 9 than in grade 8 and 36% of the participants' GPAs fell by 1 point or more. In the next year, the GPA of only 24% of participants fell by 1 point or more. This trend seems to be continuing with this year's group of participants. In other words, the program appears to have had the effect of slowing down the precipitous slide in grades between grade 8 and 9 for many participants.

The percentage of students achieving a 2.0 or C average has also increased. For example, of the comparison group in grade 11, only 2 of the 7 students remaining in school achieved a 2.0 average. This year in grade 11, 8 of the 17 students (47%) remaining from the first group of 25 participants have at least a 2.0 average. Of the program participants now in grade 10, 32% have at least a 2.0 average. When the comparison group of non-participants was in grade 10, only 13% maintained at least a 2.0 average.

2. Are participants increasing their school attendance?

A large number of program participants appear to date to be increasing their school attendance. In the first group of participants, those in the program in 79-80, 45% had fewer absences in grade 9 than in grade 8 and 57% had fewer absences in grade 10 than in grade 9. Of the 21 students from this group in grade 10, 29% have had consistently increasing attendance. In the second group of participants, 44% had fewer absences in grade 9 than in grade 8.

Although the data for attendance in 81-82 is necessarily incomplete, the trend of increased attendance for many students seems

to be continuing. This trend is especially impressive in comparison with the attendance figures for the group of 78-79 grade 9 non-participants in which only 25% had fewer absences in grade 9 than in grade 8 and 24% had fewer absences in grade 10 than in grade 9.

3. Are participants reducing their suspensions and detentions?

The information about suspensions and detentions does not show clear patterns. The average number of detentions increased by one-third between grades 9 and 10 for 79-80 participants. For 80-81 participants, the number of detentions decreased by one-third between grades 9 and 10. Very few individual students have consistently increasing or decreasing numbers of detentions over several years. The range of number of detentions in any one group over a year is wide (57-0, 44-0, 39-0, etc.).

While all but 2 or 3 students in each group have detentions, fewer than half have suspensions in any one year. As with detentions, there do not seem to be consistent increases or decreases of the number of days suspended for individual students.

4. Are participants increasing their participation in the school's extra-curricular activity?

Program participants appear to be increasing their participation in the school's extra-curricular activities. Although grades generally have gone down between grades 8 and 9, involvement in extra-curricular activities has gone up. Of 23 students in the 79-80 group for whom both grade 8 and grade 9 data are available, 9 or 39% increased their activities and only 2 or 9% decreased their activity. In the 25 students originally in this group, 8 or 32% have showed a steady increase in their extra-curricular participation. Of concern, however, are the 12 (48%) students of this group who have had no participation in extra-curricular activities during their years in high school.

In the 80-81 group, 7 (28%) of 25 increased activities between grades 8 and 9 while 5 (20%) of 25 decreased their activities.

Of these 5 students, 4 are women. This year's information up to March indicates that more students are increasing their involvement and that only 4, 3 of whom are women, have not participated in extra-curricular activities. To date, 6 of 17 (35%) participants in the 81-82 program have increased their activities.

5. Are participants remaining in school?

It is clear from the information to date that program participants are staying in school in increasing numbers. Of the 25 students in the first program in 79-80, 8 have dropped out with 3 of these 8 returning to some form of secondary schooling making the real drop-out rate 20%. Of the 17 remaining, 8 or 47% have at least a 2.0 average. The second group of participants has not yet reached the common school-leaving decision point between grades 10 and 11, but not one of these students has yet dropped out. The only student to drop out in the present program year has already returned.

This information is even more impressive when viewed with that for the comparison group which should now be in grade 12. Of this group of 20 students, 12 or 60% are known to have dropped out of this school or another to which they had transferred with 2 of the 12 later enrolling in another school, making a real drop out rate of 50%. All but 3 of these students dropped out before grade 11. Of the 20 students in the comparison group, not one is presently in the high school as 7 have transferred, 1 graduated, and 12 dropped out.

6. Is participants' increase or decrease in the above areas related to their level of participation in the program?

Each student is awarded from 0 to 2 credits for their participation in the program. The number of credits is based on the time they spend in program activity. For example, participants receiving ½ point may have left the program after a few months, may not have been identified as part of the original group and entered the

program late, or may have participated in a minimal number of activities. There appear to be no significant relationships between a participant's grades, absences, detentions, suspensions, extra-curricular activities and his or her level of participation in the program.

However, there is a strong relationship for the 79 program between the students' level of participation and their staying in school. Of the 25 students, 2 have transferred. Of the remaining 23, 12 participants received from 2 to 1¼ points. Eleven participants received from 1 to 0 points. Of the 12 receiving over 1 point, 11 are still in school. Three dropped out with 2 later returning to schooling. Of the 11 receiving 1 or fewer points, 7 are still in school. Five dropped out with 1 later returning.

Conclusions

The goal of the program is being achieved. Students are staying in school in greater numbers. The drop-out rate among these students identified as high risk for dropping out at Georges Valley is now low. For the 79 group of participating students, the first group to have reached grade 11, there is also a strong correlation between their level of program participation and staying in school.

Although students are staying in school, their grades, attendance, number of detentions and suspensions, and extra-curricular involvement are not markedly better as a group. Some individuals go up; others go down; changes are not dramatic. In other words, the objectives of raising grades, attendance and extra-curricular involvement while lowering the detentions and suspensions do not appear to be enabling objectives for the goal of keeping students in school. However, the amount or level of program participation does appear to be an important factor in students staying in school. Information on students' level of program participation and staying in or leaving school should continue to be collected to determine whether this relationship continues.

If Georges Valley High School wishes to pursue the question of "what are enabling objectives for the goal of keeping students in school?", the next step might be to develop a quick interview schedule for use with program participants. Exploring participants' feelings about their lives, the school and its place in their lives, the decisions to stay in school, etc. could provide ideas about the context of the program and the school for further assessment. In light of the low increase in grades, the school might also want to ask other questions about students' learning. For example, are program participants' basic skills in reading, writing, and math at a level at which they can be successful in regular classes?

If the school wishes to continue annually adding to the data already collected, improved record-keeping would raise the

quality of the data. Project staff who acted as recorders found that some information was difficult to find and sometimes questionable in its consistency. For example, detentions sometimes included unexcused absences, but usually did not. Clearer, more consistent information in student records would help all staff make more effective use of the school's records for a number of purposes beyond those of this study.

Appendix

Analysis

STUDENTS STAYING IN SCHOOL

I. 78 non-participants - 20 students who should now be in grade 12

7 (35%) transferred
12 (60%) dropped out; 2 drop outs later entered other schools making the drop out rate 50% of the original 20 and 77% of the 13 who did not transfer
1 (5%) graduated

II. A. 2 of 25 (8%) transferred
8 of 25 (32%) dropped out; 3 drop outs have returned to schooling making the dropout rate 20% of the original 25 and 22% of the 23 who have not transferred
1 (4%) graduated

B. Of participants receiving 1½-2 program credits, 1 has dropped out and 11 are still in school
Of participants receiving 1-0 program credits, 4 have dropped out and 7 are still in school

The relationship between level of program participation and staying in school for the 23 non-transfer participants of the 79 program is strong although not statistically significant ($p < .20$). In other words, there 4 chances out of 5 that students staying in school is related to a high level of participation in the program and one chance out of 5 that students stay in school by chance.

III. 80 participants - 25 students now in grade 10

1 (4%) transferred
0 dropped out

IV. 81 participants - 20 students now in grade 9

0 transferred
1 (4%) dropped out and returned

CHANGES IN GRADE POINT AVERAGE

I. 78 non-participants (20 students who should now be in grade 12)

1 student of 17 (17 for whom grade 8 and 9 data was available) had a higher GPA in grade 9 than in grade 8 (6%)

8 of 17 (47%) fell by 1 point or more

7 students of 15 (47%) had higher grades in grade 10 than in grade 9 although the average change was +.04

4 of 17 (24%) had at least a 2.0 in grade 9

2 of 15 (13%) achieved at least a 2.0 average in grade 10

II. 79 program participants

4 of 25 (16%) had higher GPA in grade 9 than 8

9 of 25 (36%) fell by 1 point or more

9 of 21 (43%) had higher GPA in grade 10 than 9

5 of 21 (24%) had at least 2.0 GPA in grade 10

8 of 17 (47%) have at least a 2.0 GPA to date in 81-82

III. 80 program participants

4 of 25 (16%) had higher GPA in grade 9 than grade 8

6 of 25 (24%) fell by 1 full point or more between grade 8 and grade 9

17 of 25 (68%) had higher GPA in grade 10 than grade 9 according to 81-82 grades to date

9 of 25 (36%) had at least a 2.0 in grade 9

8 of 25 (32%) have at least a 2.0 in grade 10 according to 81-82 grades to date

IV. 81 program participants

4 of 17 (24%) had higher GPA in grade 9 than in grade 8 according to 81-82 grades to date

4 of 17 (24%) have fallen by 1 point or more to date in grade 9 to date in 81-82

3 of 19 (16%) have at least a 2.0 in grade 9 (mid year grade)

ABSENCES

	average # of days	
78 non-participants		
grade 8	11.1	
grade 9	18.9	25% had fewer absences
grade 10	26.0	24% had fewer absences
grade 11	20.7	
79 participants		
grade 8	13.7	
grade 9	16.8	45% had fewer absences
grade 10	16.5	57% had fewer absences
grade 11	11.5	to date
80 participants		
grade 8	8.5	
grade 9	9.1	44% had fewer absences
grade 10	4.7	to date
81 participants		
grade 8	13.7	
grade 9	7.2	to date

DETENTIONS

		average # detentions	Range	
78	non-participants			
	grade 9	17		
	grade 10	17	32-0	
	grade 11	8	14-0	
79				
	grade 9	12	29-0	
	grade 10	16	44-0	6 had fewer than in grade 9
	grade 11	16	57-0	to date
80				
	grade 9	15	37-0	
	grade 10	10	39-0	to date
81				
	grade 9	5	20-0	to date

SUSPENSIONS

78 non-participants	average #	Range	
grade 10	incomplete data	7-0	
grade 11		18-0	
79			
grade 9	1.8	11-0	12 of 25 have 0
grade 10	1.7	8-0	6 have fewer than grade 9
grade 11	2.1	7-0	to date
80			
grade 9	1.5	6-0	10 of 25 have 0
grade 10	1.	9-0	to date 14 of 25 have 0
81			
grade 9	1.	13.0	14 of 19 have 0 to date

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

78 non-participant	average #	
	no data	

79 participants

grade 8	.9	2 decreased
grade 9	1.6	9 increased
grade 10	2.5	6 increased/1 decreased
grade 11	3.1	6 have increased to date

*8 have showed a steady increase/4 of these were women
12 have showed no participation/6 were women

80 participants

grade 8	1.8	
grade 9	2.3	7 students increased/1 woman 5 decreased/4 women
grade 10	1.8	4 have shown increase to date

*4 show no participation in high school extracurricular activities - 3 of these 4 are women

81 participants

grade 8	1.5	
grade 9	1.9	to date 6 show increase to date 2 show decrease by 1